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Children's Defense Fund and Garrett Partner to Advance Child Well-being

Multi-year partnership aims to reset the narrative on child well-being and agency, creating new theologies

September 14, 2022; Evanston, Illinois – The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (Garrett) have formalized a strategic partnership, CDF – Garrett Joint Partnership on Theologies of Child Well-being, to support a movement toward theologies of child well-being that creates the conditions for children and youth to thrive. With recognition that children and youth are the voices of authority on their life and circumstances, the partnership's work is grounded in the contextual reality of children and youth living in the Chicagoland area.

“Child well-being includes making sure that children are growing and developing at stage-appropriate ways. It includes making sure they have the resources they need to grow into successful adults, and it includes making sure they can enjoy being children, but it is the responsibility and the obligation of the community to create the circumstances for these children to thrive. CDF is excited to partner with Garrett in ways that leverage each institution's unique gifts. CDF Freedom Schools® are our primary mechanism for movement building. Using CDF Freedom Schools® as sites of learning for students and scholars seeds new possibilities for child- and youth-informed, constructive, and practical theologies to change the narrative on child well-being,” said Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson, CDF's president and CEO.

Garrett and CDF have a long history of collaboration, including the Garrett-Evanston CDF Freedom School, the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry, and the Dale P. Andrews Freedom Seminary. This partnership expresses the collective commitment to see human flourishing through the liberation and well-being of children.

Garrett offers leadership development, theological concentrations on child advocacy in master's and PhD programs, and other initiatives that center the thriving of children and young adults. However, this partnership casts a vision beyond theological higher education. In the public square, the halls of government, schools, and faith communities, a new narrative around the promise and power of children is overdue. Garrett and CDF will collaborate to design a PhD Fellowship focused on child well-being. This effort extends Garrett's programs focused on child advocacy and integrates the practical, movement building expertise of CDF.

Objectives for this collaboration include nurturing the pipeline of public theologians, expanding each institution's presence in the Chicagoland community through community listening, meeting needs, and

developing leaders; generating theological resources for the work and vision of child well-being; and enriching the disciplines of constructive and practical theology with distinctive, innovative scholarship. This partnership helps launch a key aspect of Garrett's newly adopted Strategic Plan, which leverages strategic partnerships to help advance the student experience, creative research, the thriving of the church, and the healing of the world. With recognition that child advocacy is a starting point for the work of child well-being and that narrative change is a long game, CDF and Garrett will invest resources to support a movement together that establishes the field of child well-being in theological education.

“Garrett's long history of serving children and families dates to its founding days when the Chicago Training School prepared leaders in the 19th century to address the challenges of poverty, migration, immigration, urbanization, industrialization, and education by placing children's physical, educational, and spiritual development at the center of a holistic approach to education and leadership development. This work has continued to the present day through the Garrett Young Adult Initiative, the Garrett Freedom School, concentrations on child advocacy in master's and PhD programs, and other initiatives that center the thriving of children and young adults,” said Rev. Dr. Javier Viera, Garrett's president.

CDF serves and advocates for the largest, most diverse generation in America: the 74 million children and youth under the age of 18 and 30 million young adults under the age of 25, with particular attention to those living in poverty and communities of color. As the only national, multi-issue advocacy organization working at the intersection of child well-being and racial justice by wielding the moral authority of programmatic proximity and community organizing to inform public policy, CDF Freedom Schools® are uniquely positioned to serve as sites for service, research, and academic reflection for Garrett students.

Among the numerous benefits of this partnership, current Garrett students and alums will be able to pursue advanced graduate-level degrees and continuing theological education with a focus on child well-being, can receive fellowship support and place-based learning at area CDF Freedom Schools®, and benefit from the emerging scholarship at the intersection of theological education and child well-being. Similarly, CDF Freedom Schools® staff and volunteers will have access to academic resources to inform their practice and teaching.

An Advisory Council will provide advice and counsel to guide the partnership's work and inform the development of theological resources, innovative scholarship, and advocacy priorities.

About Children's Defense Fund

Celebrating 50 years in 2023, [Children's Defense Fund](#) envisions a nation where marginalized children flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being, and communities wield the power to ensure they thrive. The only national, multi-issue advocacy organization working at the intersection of child well-being and racial justice, CDF advances the well-being of America's most diverse generation, the 74 million children and youth under the age of 18, and 30 million young adults under the age of 25. CDF's grassroots movements in marginalized communities build power for child-centered public policy, informed by racial equity and the lived experience of children and youth. Its renowned CDF Freedom Schools® are conducted in nearly 100 cities and 30 states and territories.

About Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

[Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary](#) forms courageous leaders in the way of Jesus to cultivate communities of justice, compassion, and hope for the thriving of the church and the healing of the world. Garrett realizes this mission through educational programming and strategic partnerships that address the most critical religious and social issues that the church and the human family must confront with courage, innovation, and collaboration.